

WASHINGTON, D.C. – An amendment to provide student loan forgiveness to encourage individuals to become and remain librarians in low-income areas was offered up today by Representative Raul Grijalva (AZ-7) during the House Education and Workforce Committee's markup of H.R. 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act. The amendment passed by voice vote.

Rep. Grijalva's amendment was a modified version of a piece of legislation that Rep. Xavier Becerra (CA-31) had introduced in the 108th Congress (H.R. 2674). Rep. Grijalva, who is a member of the Education and Workforce Committee, agreed to take up Rep. Becerra's legislation and worked diligently for its passage.

"I cannot begin to articulate how grateful I am that my friend and colleague did what he did to ensure today's victory," Rep. Becerra said. "A critical first step to incentivising qualified graduates to enter educational fields that are suffering from critical shortages was taken today, and it was due to Rep. Grijalva's due diligence and winning sales pitch before his committee."

Specifically, the amendment expands section 428K of the Higher Education Act to provide up to \$5,000 in loan forgiveness for librarians working in impoverished areas. To be eligible an individual must have completed a baccalaureate or advanced degree and be employed full-time for five consecutive years as a librarian in a public library that serves a geographic area with a combined average of 30 percent of enrolled students at the poverty, or an elementary or secondary school library that is eligible for Title I assistance.

Public libraries and schools across this nation are experiencing a dire shortage of librarians. Nationwide, 47 percent of our librarians are expected to reach retirement age by 2008, while it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain librarians due to low salaries and direct competition with industries recruiting workers with similar skills.

“This altruistic, inexpensive addition to the Higher Education Act would provide a substantial incentive for tomorrow’s leaders to help educate and assist America’s children who live in some of the poorest communities in our country,” Rep Becerra said.

Becerra.house.gov